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Hong Kong as the GBA Hub for International Organisations Linking China and the World

Policy Submission to the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

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香港作為大灣區國際組織樞紐
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向香港特別行政區政府提出政策建議

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Positioning

Hong Kong as a Premier GBA Host City for International Organisations

Policy Submission to the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

OUR INSIGHTS

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Executive Summary

This policy submission advocates that Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to **become Asia's GBA premier hub for international organisations (IOs)** — and that the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region should articulate this ambition within the framework of Hong Kong's Five Year Plan. The convergence of three structural shifts in the international system creates a once-in-a-generation window of opportunity.

First, the unprecedented retreat of the United States from multilateral institutions — withdrawing from over 70 international organisations, defunding the WHO, exiting the Paris Agreement, and slashing UN humanitarian contributions from approximately US$17 billion to US$2 billion — has created a structural crisis in global governance financing and a vacuum in institutional leadership.[1] [2]

Second, China's rise as a multilateral actor has accelerated dramatically, which was the national agenda in gaining influences among IOs. China's UN budget contribution has grown twenty-fold from 0.99% in 2000 to 20.004% in 2025 (US$685.7 million). Chinese nationals now hold senior positions in over 20 major international organisations, and China-initiated institutions — AIIB (111 members), NDB (US$40 billion portfolio), SCO (40% of world population) — are reshaping global governance architecture.[3] [4]

Third, the UN80 reform initiative is driving the most significant decentralisation of UN operations in decades, with UNDP relocating 400 positions, UNICEF evaluating moves from Geneva, and agencies actively considering Bangkok, Nairobi, Dubai, and Doha as new bases.[5] [6]

In that case, Hong Kong possesses unique advantages that no other Asian and GBA city can match: a separate international legal personality under "One Country, Two Systems"; the only common law jurisdiction within China; over 40 membership in intergovernmental organisations; 265 multilateral treaties; 8 officially recognised IO offices (including the new IOMed global headquarters); bilingual legal capacity; the world's freest economy with a very high standard of clean and efficient governance; and the 3rd-ranked global financial centre.

This submission proposes specific policy recommendations — including a (1) lobby Beijing for a support from national-level strategy, (2) dedicated legal framework for IO privileges and immunities, (3) the establishment of a Commissioner for International Organisations, (4) proactive bidding for relocating UN and IOs agencies, and (5) non-binding KPI targets to grow Hong Kong's IO influences within the Five-Year Plan period.

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[1] White House, Executive Order 14155, 20 January 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-the-worldhealth-organization/
[2] Al Jazeera, "US Slashes UN Humanitarian Aid to $2B," December 2025. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/29/us-slashes-un-humanitarian-aid-to-2bn-huge-cut-as-trump-demands-reforms
[3] Pew Research Center, "How the United Nations Is Funded," July 2025. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/07/31/how-the-united-nations-is-funded-and-who-pays-the-most/
[4] USCC, "PRC Representation in International Organizations," May 2025. https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2025-05/PRC_Representation_in_International_Organizations_May2025.pdf
[5] UNDP, "UNDP to Relocate Substantial Share of New York-Based Posts," January 2026. https://www.undp.org/press-releases/un-development-programme-relocate-substantial-share-new-york-based-posts
[6] Reuters, "UNICEF to Move Jobs Out of Geneva," November 2025. https://www.reuters.com/world/un-childrens-agency-move-jobs-out-geneva-amidst-global-funding-cuts-2025-11-19/

Section I: The Geopolitical Context — A Once-in-a-Generation Window of Opportunity

1.1 The Retreat of the United States from Multilateral Institutions

The second Trump administration has executed the most sweeping US retreat from multilateral institutions in the post-World War II era. By March 2026, the United States has formally withdrawn from or defunded at least 70 international organisations, revoked billions in pledged climate finance, shuttered the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and unilaterally slashed UN humanitarian contributions.[7]

On his first day in office, President Trump signed Executive Order 14155, initiating withdrawal from the World Health Organization. The US formally completed its WHO exit on 22 January 2026, leaving approximately US$260–278 million in outstanding dues unpaid. The US is the only country to have withdrawn from the WHO since its founding in 1948.[8]

On the same day, Trump signed an executive order withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement (effective 27 January 2026), making the US one of only four countries not party to the accord.[9] In July 2025, the US formally announced withdrawal from UNESCO (effective December 2026).[10] The February 2025 executive order further withdrew the US from the UN Human Rights Council and permanently ended all funding to UNRWA, the UN agency serving Palestine refugees.

The January 2026 Mass Withdrawal

On 7 January 2026, President Trump signed the most sweeping withdrawal action in US history: a Presidential Memorandum directing withdrawal from 66 international organisations — comprising 31 UN entities and 35 non-UN bodies.[11] Secretary of State Marco Rubio described the organisations as "anti-American, useless, or wasteful."[12] The withdrawn organisations include the UNFCCC (the foundational 1992 climate treaty), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, International Renewable Energy Agency, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and multiple UN Economic and Social Council regional commissions.

The financial shock to the international system has been severe. The US paused its WTO contributions in March 2025, then cancelled its US$29 million annual WTO contribution entirely in September 2025.[13][14] USAID was effectively closed, with approximately US$8 billion cut from foreign aid programmes. US contributions to UN humanitarian operations

[7] The White House, "Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations, Conventions, and Treaties that Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States," January 2026. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-conventions-and-treaties-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states/
[8] CIDRAP, "US Formally Withdraws from WHO," January 2026. https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/public-health/us-formally-withdraws-world-health-organization-leaving-debt
[9] CFR, "United States Exits Paris Agreement," January 2026. https://www.cfr.org/articles/united-states-exits-paris-agreement
[10] State Department, "US Withdraws from UNESCO," July 2025. https://www.state.gov/releases/2025/07/the-united-states-withdraws-from-the-united-nations-educational-scientific-and-cultural-organization-unesco
[11] White House, Presidential Memorandum, 7 January 2026. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-conventions-and-treaties-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states/
[12] Al Jazeera, "Which Are the 66 Global Organisations the US Is Leaving Under Trump," 8 January 2026. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/8/which-are-the-66-global-organisations-the-us-is-leaving-under-trump
[13] Reuters, "US Suspends Financial Contributions to WTO," March 2025. https://www.reuters.com/world/us-suspends-financial-contributions-wto-trade-sources-say-2025-03-27/
[14] WTTL Online, "US Ends WTO Funding," September 2025. https://www.wttlonline.com/stories/us-ends-wto-funding-in-pocket-rescission,14227

were slashed from approximately US$17 billion in recent years to a pledged US$2 billion for 2026.[15]

The Chatham House analysis of June 2025 concluded: "We have never seen a similar wholesale retreat in the post-war era from the US's global governance contributions." The vacuums created will not be automatically filled by others, and the short-term outlook for global governance is described as "bleak."[16]

1.2 The Rise of China and Asia in Global Governance

China has systematically positioned itself as a leading multilateral actor. Its financial contributions to the UN system have grown dramatically: from an assessed contribution rate of 0.99% in 2000 to 20.004% in 2025 — a twenty-fold increase in 25 years — contributing US$685.7 million to the UN regular budget. China is now the second-largest contributor after the United States.[17]

Chinese Nationals in International Organisation Leadership

According to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission's May 2025 report, Chinese nationals now hold leadership or senior positions in over 20 major international organisations.[18] Key appointments include, but is not limited to,

Organisation	Position	Name
FAO	Director-General	Dongyu Qu
UNDP	Associate Administrator (USG)	Haoliang Xu
UN-DESA	Under-Secretary-General	Junhua Li
IMF	Deputy Managing Director	Bo Li
World Bank	Managing Director & CAO	Wencai Zhang
WTO	Deputy Director-General	Xiangchen Zhang
AIIB	President	Liqun Jin
IAEA	DDG, Technical Cooperation	Hua Liu
ICJ	Judge	Hanqin Xue

Table 1: Selected Chinese Nationals in Senior IO Positions (Source: USCC, May 2025)

China-Initiated International Institutions

Beyond staffing existing institutions, China has established a parallel architecture of multilateral organisations. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), headquartered in Beijing with 111 member countries, approved US$8.4 billion in financing for 51 projects in 2024 alone and is committed to deploying at least US$75 billion more by

[15]Refugees International, "A Generational Collapse," 2025. https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/a-generational-collapse-tracking-the-toll-of-trumps-humanitarian-aid-cuts/
[16]Chatham House, "Can US Retreat from Global Governance Be Exploited?" June 2025. https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/06/can-us-retreat-global-governance-be-exploited-other-powers
[17]CGTN, "China Is the Second-Largest Contributor to UN's Budgets," September 2025. https://news.cgtn.com/news/2025-09-27/Graphics-China-is-the-second-largest-contributor-to-UN-s-budgets-1H0a8P5Ex4k/p.html
[18] US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, "PRC in International Organizations" April 2026. https://www.uscc.gov/research/prc-international-organizations

2030.[19] The New Development Bank (NDB), headquartered in Shanghai, has built a US$40 billion portfolio across 122 projects.[20]

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), with its permanent Secretariat in Beijing, now encompasses 10 full members, and at the 2025 Tianjin Summit agreed to establish an SCO Development Bank.[21] The Belt and Road Initiative spans 150 countries with cumulative engagement of US$1.4 trillion, including a record US$213.5 billion in 2025.[22]

In May 2025, China pledged US$500 million to the WHO over five years, positioning itself to become the WHO's largest state donor following the US exit. Chinese Vice Premier Liu Guozhong explicitly framed the pledge as a stand against "unilateralism."[23]

Asia's Economic Weight

Asia's economic weight in the global system is now undeniable. Asia's nominal GDP stands at 36.9% of the world total (approximately US$42.6 trillion in 2025), and on a purchasing power parity basis, Asia accounts for approximately 49% of world GDP.[24] The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest trade bloc, covers 30% of global GDP and 30% of the global population.[25] Emerging Asia contributes 60% of global economic growth.[26]

East Asia and Pacific's share of world trade has risen from 24% in 2001 to 32% in 2025.[27] Yet Asia remains massively underrepresented in the governance of legacy multilateral institutions. China's calculated IMF quota share based on economic weight is 13.72%, but its actual quota share is only 6.40%. The Asia-Pacific Group constitutes 27% of UN membership but only approximately 17% of UN Secretariat international staff.[28]

1.3 The Strategic Opportunity: A Structural Shift in International Institutional Geography

These three trends — US retreat, China's rise, and Asia's economic primacy — are converging with a fourth development: the active decentralisation of the UN system. The UN80 reform initiative, driven by funding crises and a desire to be closer to field operations and reducing dependence on western hemisphere, is producing the most significant geographic reshuffling of UN operations in decades.

[19] AIIB, "2024 Project Financing Report," June 2025. https://www.aiib.org/en/news-events/news/2025/aiib-reports-usd84-billion-2024-project-financing-underscoring-long-term-impact-through-sustainable-development-bonds.html
[20] NDB Investor Presentation, February 2026. https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/New-Development-Bank_Investor-Presentation_Feb-2026.pdf
[21] CSIS, "China Showcases Global Ambitions at SCO Summit," September 2025. https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-showcases-global-ambitions-shanghai-cooperation-organization-summit
[22] Green FDC, "China BRI Investment Report 2025," January 2026. https://greenfdc.org/china-belt-and-road-initiative-bri-investment-report-2025/
[23] Reuters, "China to Give $500 Million to WHO," May 2025. https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-give-500-million-who-next-5-years-official-says-2025-05-20/
[24] StatisticsTimes, "Asia GDP," 2025. https://statisticstimes.com/economy/asia-gdp.php
[25] APEC Research Portal, "RCEP." https://research.apec.org/rcep/
[26] Statista/OECD, "Contributions to Global Economic Growth," June 2025. https://www.statista.com/chart/34606/contributions-to-global-economic-growth/
[27] DHL Global Connectedness Report 2026. https://www.dhl.com/mn-en/home/press/press-archive/2026/asia-pacific-strengthens-its-position-as-a-global-trade-anchor-dhl-global-connectedness-report-2026.html
[28] DD News, "Asia Underrepresented in UNSC," January 2026. https://ddnews.gov.in/en/asia-underrepresented-among-unsc-permanent-membership-should-be-rectified-says-guterres/

UNDP announced in January 2026 that it has relocated approximately 400 positions from its New York headquarters.[29] UN Women and UNFPA are being evaluated for merger and relocation to Nairobi and Bonn.[30]

Competition among host cities is intensifying. Switzerland allocated CHF 269 million (approximately US$329 million) for the 2025–2029 period to defend Geneva's position as a multilateral hub — an extraordinary commitment that underscores both the value of IO hosting and the severity of competitive pressure.[31][32]

This is not a cyclical fluctuation. Legal experts note that US withdrawal creates barriers to future re-entry that require Senate approval, making reversals by future administrations politically and legally more complex. The structural nature of these shifts creates a once-in-a-generation window for Asian cities to attract major IO functions, fundamentally reshaping the geography of global governance to better reflect the actual distribution of economic activity and population.

[29] Diplomacy & Commerce, "The UN agency is moving 400 employees from New York to Spain and Germany", January 2026. https://www.diplomacyandcommerce.hr/the-un-agency-is-moving-400-employees-from-new-york-to-spain-and-germany/
[30] Global Issues, "UN Restructuring Relocations," October 2025. https://www.globalissues.org/news/2025/10/10/41288
[31] Reuters, "Swiss Spend $329 Million to Support Geneva Diplomatic Hub," June 2025. https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/society-equity/swiss-spend-329-million-support-geneva-diplomatic-hub-2025-06-20/
[32] Swiss Federal Council, "Reinforce Geneva's Position," June 2025. https://www.news.admin.ch/en/newnsb/q6uAkjLQmvcWXUCvIATct

Section II: Why Hong Kong — The Case for Hong Kong as Asia's Premier International Organisation Hub

2.1 Constitutional and Legal Framework Under "One Country, Two Systems"

Hong Kong's capacity to host international organisations is grounded in the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, which provides one of the most comprehensive external affairs frameworks of any sub-national entity in the world. Chapter VII (Articles 150–157) establishes Hong Kong's international legal personality within the "One Country, Two Systems" framework.

Article 151 is the cornerstone: it empowers Hong Kong to independently "maintain and develop relations and conclude and implement agreements with foreign states and regions and relevant international organizations" in the fields of economics, trade, finance, shipping, communications, tourism, culture, and sports. Article 152 provides that HKSAR representatives may participate in international organisations and conferences. Article 153 ensures that international treaties may continue to apply specifically to Hong Kong, including those to which the PRC is not a party.

Hong Kong is the only common law jurisdiction within Chinese mainland — a constitutional fact guaranteed by Articles 8 and 81 of the Basic Law, which preserve common law, equity, and existing ordinances. Article 84 expressly permits courts to refer to precedents of other common law jurisdictions. The legal system operates bilingually in English and Chinese, with both texts of all ordinances equally authentic.

2.2 Hong Kong's Existing International Institutional Footprint

Hong Kong already possesses a substantial and unique international footprint. It participates in 41 intergovernmental organisations as "Hong Kong, China" — including as a founding member of the WTO (since 1995), a full member of APEC (since 1991), and a full member of the FATF (since 1991).[33]

Organisation	Membership Type	Since
World Trade Organization (WTO)	Founding member, separate customs territory	1995
Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)	Full member	1991
Financial Action Task Force (FATF)	Full member	1991
World Customs Organization (WCO)	Member	1987
Bank for International Settlements (BIS)	Member	1996

[33] TID, Hong Kong's Participation in the WTO. https://www.tid.gov.hk/en/our_work/hk_participation_in_ito/wto/overview/hk_participation.html

International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Member	2001
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Member	1969
International Hydrographic Organization (IHO)	Member	1993
Universal Postal Union (UPU)	Member	1877
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)	Member	1948
International Olympic Committee (IOC)	Member (HK Olympic Committee)	1951
International Organization for Standardization (ISO)	Correspondent member	1968
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)	Associate member	1947
International Maritime Organization (IMO)	Associate member	1967
UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)	Associate member	1999
Interpol	Sub-bureau (under PRC)	1960

Table A1: Hong Kong's Intergovernmental Organisation Memberships (Selected; Source: TID, Wikipedia)

Hong Kong joined many key bodies prior to 1997, especially in trade, finance, and technical cooperation. Taken together, these memberships show that under British administration Hong Kong was progressively embedded into the global institutional order as a highly open, externally oriented economy with its own identity in trade, finance, standards, and sporting representation.

By the time of the 1997 handover, most of the city's core international linkages were already in place, enabling a relatively smooth transition from "British Hong Kong" to "Hong Kong, China" without disrupting its role in international organizations. This pre-1997 accumulation of memberships is a key institutional legacy of British rule and remains central to Hong Kong's external economic and functional autonomy today.

Officially Recognised International Organisation Offices in Hong Kong

As at 31.12.2025, there are 63 Consulates-General, 50 Honorary Consulates. The Hong Kong Protocol Division currently recognises 8 international organisation offices with formal status:[34]

[34] HK Protocol Division, Consular Affairs. https://www.protocol.gov.hk/en/posts.html

Organisation	Status/Notes
Bank for International Settlements (BIS)	Representative Office for Asia and the Pacific
Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH)	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP)
International Finance Corporation (IFC) / World Bank	Regional Office for East Asia and Pacific and the World Bank Private Sector Development Office for East Asia and Pacific
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Hong Kong SAR Sub-Office
International Organization for Mediation (IOMed)	Global Headquarters (inaugurated October 2025)
Office of the European Union	EU Office to Hong Kong
AALCO Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre	Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization
UNHCR	Sub-Office in Hong Kong

Table 2: Officially Recognised International Organisation Offices in Hong Kong (Source: Protocol Division, 31 December 2025)

The establishment of IOMed's global headquarters in Hong Kong in October 2025 is a landmark achievement — the first new intergovernmental organisation to choose Hong Kong as its worldwide headquarters.[35][36] The Convention on the Establishment of IOMed was signed on 30 May 2025, and at its inaugural Governing Council meeting, 87 senior officials from 31 states attended. This demonstrates that Hong Kong remains an attractive venue for new multilateral bodies.

Hong Kong hosted the Sixth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC6) in December 2005 — the only sub-national entity ever to host a WTO ministerial conference.[37] The city maintains 63 Consulates-General and 50 Honorary Consulates — totalling 121 diplomatic posts, one of the highest concentrations of consular presence of any city worldwide. Fifteen overseas Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices (HKETOs) represent the city's interests globally, with accreditations to the WTO, EU, and IMO.[38]

As of 30 September 2025, over 265 multilateral treaties apply to Hong Kong, of which more than 40 apply to Hong Kong but not the Chinese Mainland — a remarkable illustration of the distinctiveness of Hong Kong's international legal position.[39]

[35] IOMed, Inauguration of Headquarters in Hong Kong, October 2025. https://www.iomed.int/2025/10/the-inauguration-of-the-international-organization-for-mediation-headquartered-in-hong-kong-with-photos20-october-2025/

[36] HK Department of Justice, IOMed HQ Building. https://www.doj.gov.hk/en/community_engagement/press/20250730_pr3.html

[37] World Trade Organization, The Sixth WTO Ministerial Conference, 2026 . https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min05_e/min05_e.htm

[38] Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, Economic and Trade Offices, June 2026. https://www.cedb.gov.hk/en/trade-and-investment/economic-and-trade-offices.html

[39] HK Department of Justice, Multilateral Agreements Applicable to HKSAR. https://www.doj.gov.hk/en/external/treaties.html

Category	Number	Key Examples
ILO Conventions	18	Freedom of Association (No. 87); Right to Organise (No. 98); Labour Inspection (No. 81)
Hague Conventions	4 HK-only	Child Abduction; Trusts; Divorce Recognition; Form of Wills
Customs Conventions	10	Temporary Importation (1954, 1956, 1961); Istanbul Convention (1990)
Maritime Conventions	11	Hague-Visby Rules; Arrest of Ships (1952); LLMC (1976/1996)
Human Rights	2+	ICCPR (entrenched in Art. 39); Stateless Persons Convention (1954)
Civil Aviation	2	Air Services Transit Agreement (1944); Guadalajara Convention (1961)
Trade / WTO	2	WTO Agreements (Marrakesh 1994); Advisory Centre on WTO Law (1999)

Table B1: International Treaties Applying to Hong Kong but Not the Chinese Mainland (Selected) (Source: DoJ, as at 30 September 2025)

2.3 Rule of Law, Legal Infrastructure, and Institutional Strengths

Hong Kong's institutional strengths are well-documented by international benchmarks:

Benchmark	Ranking	Source
Economic Freedom	#1 globally (world's freest economy)	Fraser Institute 2025
Global Financial Centre	#3 globally, #1 Asia-Pacific	GFCI 38, September 2025
Rule of Law	23rd globally, 6th in East Asia & Pacific	WJP 2024
World Competitiveness	5th globally	IMD 2024
Business Legislation	#1 globally	IMD 2024
Fintech Competitiveness	#1 globally	GFCI 38
Absence of Corruption	10th globally	WJP 2024
Order and Security	8th globally	WJP 2024

Table 3: Hong Kong's Key International Rankings (Sources: Fraser Institute, GFCI, WJP, IMD)

Hong Kong's legal profession comprises 11,700 solicitors, 1,700 barristers, 1,500 foreign lawyers from 31 jurisdictions, and 80 foreign law firms. The Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre (HKIAC) is ranked 3rd globally as an arbitration seat, and Hong Kong arbitral awards are enforceable in 170+ New York Convention contracting states.

Hong Kong is the only GBA city that has concluded 9 FTAs covering 21 economies, 52 double taxation agreements, 24 investment agreements with 33 economies, and 69+ bilateral air services agreements.[40][41] 175 countries and territories grant visa-free access to HKSAR passport holders. The territory maintains a simple and low tax regime: no VAT, no capital gains tax, no general import tariffs, with a standard corporate profits tax rate of 16.5% and full free port status.[42]

2.4 Strategic Advantages Unique to Hong Kong

Beyond these measurable institutional strengths, Hong Kong possesses several strategic advantages that are unique and difficult to replicate:

Gateway to Mainland China. Hong Kong provides unparalleled access to the world's second-largest economy and second-largest UN contributor. The Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) with the Chinese Mainland provides institutional and economic connectivity that no other international city can offer.

Greater Bay Area integration. Hong Kong sits at the heart of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, a metropolitan region of 86 million people with a combined GDP comparable to major national economies.

Belt and Road "super connector". Hong Kong is explicitly designated in official PRC documents as the BRI's primary platform, and the AALCO Regional Arbitration Centre in Hong Kong was established specifically for resolving multilateral BRI disputes.[43]

Dual service capacity. Hong Kong's unique constitutional position allows it to serve both Chinese national interests and the international community simultaneously — a proposition that is attractive to international organisations seeking engagement with China while maintaining the operational independence that comes with Hong Kong's separate legal system, common law framework, and international treaty obligations.

[40] TID, Hong Kong's FTAs. https://www.tid.gov.hk/en/our_work/trade_and_investment_agreements/fta.html
[41] China Briefing, Hong Kong's DTAs. https://www.china-briefing.com/doing-business-guide/hong-kong/why-hong-kong/hong-kong-s-double-taxation-avoidance-agreements
[42] Fraser Institute, Economic Freedom of the World 2025. https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202509/25/P2025092501234.htm
[43] DoJ, Establishment of IO Offices in Hong Kong. https://www.doj.gov.hk/en/external/establishment_of_offices_or_operation_of_international_intergovernmental_organisations_in_hong_kong.html

Section III: Learning from Global Best Practices — How Host Cities Attract International Organisations

An examination of the world's leading IO host cities reveals consistent patterns in the policies, frameworks, and institutional machinery that underpin their success. The following comparative analysis draws on evidence from Geneva, Vienna, The Hague, Nairobi, and Singapore.

City	IOs Hosted	Jobs (including FTE)	Key Policy Examples
Geneva	~40 IOs, ~750 NGOs	37,000	Host State Act; FIPOI building loans; CHF 269M (2025-29)
Vienna	~40 IOs	16,000	99-yr VIC lease; Vienna Service Office
The Hague	~40 IGOs, 480 non-profits	40,000	AMIO ambassador; constitutional mandate; HGIS budget
Nairobi	~80 UN offices, ~150 IOs	6,500	Only Global South UN HQ; active campus expansion
Singapore	APEC Sec, INTERPOL IGCI	—	IHQ Award (5-15% tax); EDB promotion

Table 4: Comparative IO Host City Analysis (Sources: Swiss FDFA, WIFO, The Hague Convention Bureau, UNON, EDB Singapore)

<u>Key Lessons from overseas countries / regions</u>

1. Every successful hub has a clear thematic identity

Geneva is defined by health, trade, and humanitarian affairs; Vienna by nuclear energy, drugs, and space; The Hague by peace, justice, and international law; Singapore by Asia-Pacific economic cooperation and technology. Each city has carved a distinctive niche rather than pursuing a generic "international city" brand.

2. A codified legal framework for privileges and immunities is essential

Switzerland's Host State Act (enacted 2007, in force 2008) provides a unified legal framework governing privileges, immunities, tax exemptions, and financial subsidies for international organisations. It codifies premises inviolability, tax exemptions, currency and financial freedom, diplomatic status for staff, and the discretion to provide financial contributions. This legal certainty is a primary competitive advantage.

3. Subsidised or purpose-built premises are powerful lures

The Vienna International Centre is leased to the United Nations for a symbolic annual rent of approximately €0.07 for 99 years — one of the most generous premises arrangements globally.[44] Switzerland's FIPOI provides interest-free construction loans for IO buildings. The Hague provides dedicated budgetary provision for IO accommodation through its HGIS budget.[45]

4. Staff services matter

Vienna operates a dedicated Vienna Service Office (VSO) at the VIC that provides UN employees and their families with free information and personal support on housing, schools, healthcare, and integration. International schools, spousal employment facilitation, and streamlined immigration processing are standard across all major IO hubs.

5. Dedicated institutional machinery is critical

The Netherlands maintains a dedicated Ambassador for International Organisations (AMIO) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an interministerial working group (RIO), and a Host Nation Division that coordinates all IO policy.[46]

6. Serious fiscal commitment is required

Switzerland's CHF 269 million allocation for 2025–2029 to defend Geneva's IO position — including emergency measures, host state disbursements, loan suspensions, and renovation financing — demonstrates that IO attraction requires sustained, significant financial commitment. [47]

[44] UN Vienna, Vienna International Centre. https://www.unvienna.org/unvienna/en/2nd/unvienna.html
[45]The Hague Convention Bureau, "Economic Impact of International City of Peace and Justice." https://thehague.com/conventionbureau/en/news/economic-impact-international-city-peace-and-justice-continues-grow
[46] The Kingdom of the Netherlands, "Paul van den Ijssel, Ambassador for International Organizations". https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/web/nl-host-nation/about-us/ambassador-for-international-organisations-amio
[47] Switzerland global Enterprise, "News Federal government investing in International Geneva", November 2025. https://www.s-ge.com/invest/en/articles/news/federal-government-investing-international-geneva

Section IV: Policy Recommendations — What Hong Kong Can Do in the Five-Year Plan

Drawing on the geopolitical analysis, Hong Kong's existing strengths, and global best practices, this submission proposes seven interconnected policy recommendations for inclusion in Hong Kong's contribution to the 15th Five-Year Plan.

4.1 Strategic Positioning: Define Hong Kong's International Organisation Niche

Hong Kong should define a clear thematic identity for its IO hub ambitions, building on existing strengths. We recommend positioning around five complementary clusters:

International trade and economic governance — leveraging Hong Kong's founding WTO membership, APEC participation, and status as the world's freest economy to host trade governance bodies, dispute resolution mechanisms, and standard-setting institutions.

Financial regulation and standard-setting — leveraging Hong Kong's GFCI #3 status, BIS Asia-Pacific office, FATF membership, and emerging fintech leadership to host bodies focused on financial regulation, anti-money laundering standards, and digital finance governance.

Belt and Road dispute resolution and legal cooperation — leveraging the AALCO Regional Arbitration Centre, IOMed global headquarters, HKIAC, and common law system to position Hong Kong as the primary venue for BRI-related dispute resolution and international legal cooperation.

Climate finance and green bond governance — leveraging Hong Kong's status as Asia's top bond issuance hub and growing green finance ecosystem to attract bodies focused on climate finance standards, green bond certification, and carbon market governance.

Technology governance and digital trade — leveraging APEC digital economy work, Hong Kong's #1 fintech competitiveness ranking, and the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement to host emerging institutions in technology governance, AI ethics, and digital trade rules.

4.2 Lobby Beijing for a National-Level Strategy

This submission recommends that the HKSAR Government formally propose to the Central Government, through the 15th Five-Year Plan consultation process, that Hong Kong be designated as China's primary platform for hosting international organisations.

This designation would align directly with China's increasing leadership in multilateral institutions and its strategic interest in hosting IO functions in a jurisdiction that combines Chinese sovereignty with international legal credibility. Beijing could proactively propose Hong Kong as a host for relocated or new IO offices and functions, channelling its growing influence in multilateral appointment processes to benefit Hong Kong.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Commissioner's Office in Hong Kong already maintains a Department of International Organizations and Conferences that coordinates Hong

Kong's IO participation.[48] This department's mandate should be expanded and resourced to support a proactive attraction strategy.

4.3 Establish a Dedicated Legal and Institutional Framework

Hong Kong currently lacks a unified legal framework governing the privileges and immunities of international organisations. Arrangements are made ad hoc through individual agreements — an approach that creates uncertainty and is competitively disadvantageous compared to cities like Geneva (Host State Act) and Vienna (comprehensive headquarters agreements).

This submission recommends the enactment of an **"International Organisations (Privileges and Immunities) Ordinance"**, modelled on Switzerland's Host State Act and the . The ordinance should codify:

(a) Tax exemptions for international organisations and their staff; (b) premises inviolability for IO offices; (c) immunity from legal process for IO operations; (d) currency and financial freedom; (e) diplomatic-equivalent immigration status for IO staff and dependents; (f) the legal authority for the Government to offer financial subsidies, designated premises, and operational support packages.

The Government should also designate specific government land and premises for IO use — particularly within the Northern Metropolis development area, the Kai Tak development, or other strategic locations — with the long-term vision of creating an "International Centre Hong Kong".

4.4 Create a Commissioner for International Organisations

We recommend the establishment of a new role: **Commissioner for International Organisations**, situated within the Chief Secretary's Office or the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB).

This role would be modelled on the Netherlands' Ambassador for International Organisations (AMIO) and would serve as the Government's dedicated lead for IO attraction, bid preparation, host-country relationship management, and IO staff support coordination. The Commissioner should be supported by an interbureau working group involving the Financial Secretary's Office (FSTB), the Secretary for Justice's Office, CEDB, InvestHK, and the Protocol Division.

The creation of permanent institutional machinery — rather than ad hoc taskforces — signals long-term commitment and ensures continuity of policy across administrations.

4.5 Proactive Bidding and Attraction to IOs

Hong Kong should actively bid for UN agencies and international organisations considering relocation under the UN80 reform initiative.

Target categories should include:

(a) UN agencies relocating under UN80 reforms — particularly those with Asia-Pacific mandates; (b) new or emerging international organisations in areas aligned with Hong

[48] The Commissioner's Office of China's Foreign Ministry in the Hong Kong SAR, "Department of International Organizations and Conferences", September 2029. https://hk.ocmfa.gov.cn/eng/zjgs/zygy/200611/t20061127_7739490.htm

Kong's strengths (fintech regulation, digital trade, climate finance, space governance); (c) regional offices or branches of existing IOs seeking Asian bases; (d) secretariats for international treaties and conventions to which Hong Kong is party.

Bidding packages should be competitive, drawing on the legal framework recommended in Section 4.3 and including purpose-built or designated premises, operational subsidies during establishment phases, streamlined staff support, and conference facilities.

Hong Kong should leverage Beijing's growing influence in multilateral appointments and governance processes to channel new bodies to the city.

4.6 Setting Non-Binding KPI Targets in the Five-Year Plan

To demonstrate government commitment and provide accountability, this submission proposes the inclusion of non-binding aspirational Key Performance Indicator (KPI) targets in the Five-Year Plan. These targets acknowledge that IO attraction depends substantially on external factors, but they articulate a clear ambition and provide a framework for measuring progress.

Key Performance Indicator	Current Baseline (2025)	Five-Year Target (2031)
Officially recognised IO offices in HK	8	15–20
Treaty-based IOs with HK headquarters	1 (IOMed)	3–5
IO-related employment in HK	~500 (est.)	2,000–3,000
Annual IO-related conferences hosted	~50 (est.)	150+
FTAs concluded	9 (21 economies)	12+ (30+ economies)
DTAs concluded	52	60+
IO staff satisfaction/retention rate	Baseline TBD	85%+

Table 5: Proposed Non-Binding KPI Targets for the Five-Year Plan (2026–2031)

The target of growing from 8 to 15–20 IO offices is ambitious but achievable given the current window of opportunity. For context, The Hague's IO-related organisations grew 187% between 2004 and 2019 — demonstrating that rapid growth is possible with sustained policy commitment.[49]

4.7 Infrastructure and Support Ecosystem

The final recommendation addresses the physical and service infrastructure needed to support a growing IO community in Hong Kong.

[49] Netherlands Helsinki Committee, "The Hague continues to grow as international City of Peace and Justice," August 2020. https://www.nhc.nl/the-hague-continues-to-grow-as-international-city-of-peace-and-justice/

International Centre Hong Kong. Designate a purpose-built international organisation campus — modelled on the Vienna International Centre — within the Northern Metropolis development or the Kai Tak development area. This campus should include IO office space, conference facilities, common services, and diplomatic meeting areas, offered at nominal or subsidised rents.

International Staff Service Office. Establish a one-stop support office for IO staff and their families — modelled on Vienna's Vienna Service Office — providing assistance with housing, schools, healthcare registration, spousal employment, and daily administrative needs. This office should be co-located with or adjacent to the International Centre.

International school capacity expansion. Ensure that Hong Kong's international school system has sufficient capacity to accommodate IO staff families. This may require earmarking places or establishing a new international school within the Northern Metropolis development.

Fast-track visa and work permit processing. Implement expedited immigration processing for IO staff and their dependents, analogous to the diplomatic-equivalent treatment provided in Geneva and Vienna.

Conference facilities investment. Invest in world-class conference facilities capable of hosting major intergovernmental conferences and ministerial meetings, building on the success of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (which hosted WTO MC6 in 2005).

Section V: Conclusion — Hong Kong's Moment

The convergence of the United States' unprecedented retreat from multilateral institutions, China's accelerating rise as a multilateral leader, the growing economic primacy of Asia, and the active decentralisation of the UN system creates an extraordinary and time-limited window of opportunity for Hong Kong.

Hong Kong possesses a combination of advantages that no other Asian and GBA city can match:

A separate international legal personality under "One Country, Two Systems", enabling direct membership in 41 intergovernmental organisations and the independent conclusion of trade, investment, and other international agreements.

The only common law jurisdiction within China, providing legal infrastructure that is familiar and trusted by international organisations accustomed to operating within common law frameworks.

A bilingual legal system operating in English and Chinese — the two most important working languages for any institution engaging with both the international community and China.

Proven institutional capacity, demonstrated by a track record that includes hosting a WTO Ministerial Conference, attracting IOMed's global headquarters, and maintaining one of the world's highest concentrations of consular offices.

Gateway status to the Chinese Mainland — the world's second-largest economy and the UN's second-largest budget contributor — through CEPA, the Greater Bay Area, and Hong Kong's designation as the BRI's primary international platform.

With strategic vision, a dedicated legal framework, permanent institutional machinery, and meaningful fiscal commitment, Hong Kong can transform itself from a city with 8 international organisation offices to Asia's premier hub — comparable in its niche to what Geneva is for health and trade, Vienna for nuclear and space, and The Hague for peace and justice.

This transformation would strengthen Hong Kong's international reputation and soft power at a time when both face challenges. It would create high-value, internationally-oriented employment. It would diversify Hong Kong's economic base beyond financial services. And critically, it would serve China's own strategic interest in having its multilateral engagements facilitated through a jurisdiction that uniquely bridges Chinese sovereignty and international institutional norms.

The 15th Five-Year Plan is the right vehicle to articulate this vision. We urge the Government to seize this moment.

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